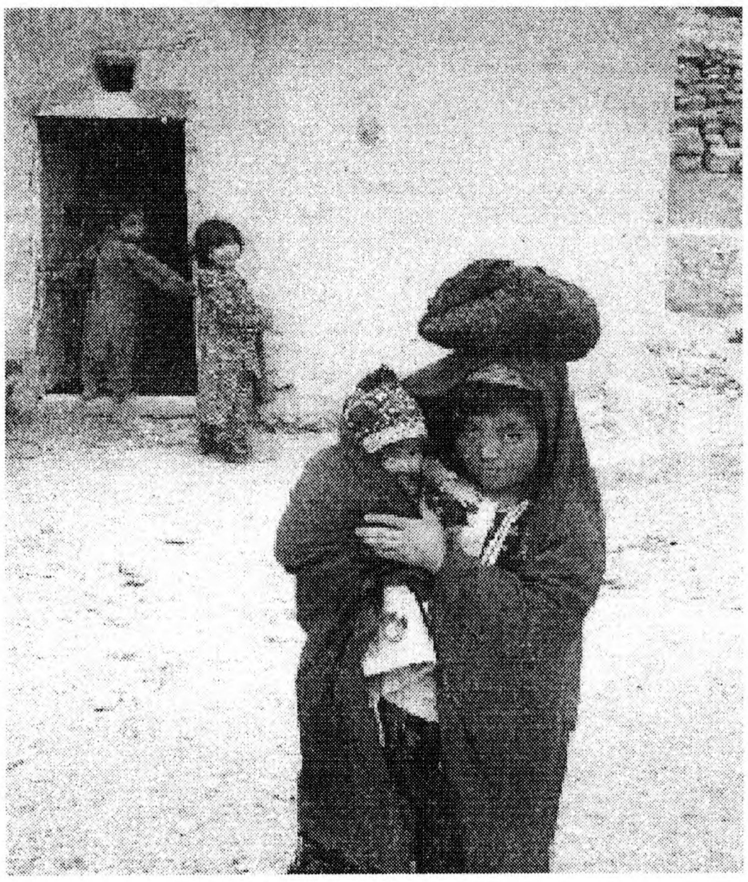
Working Paper #26
Disconnected from Discourse
Women's Radio Listening in Rural Samangan, Afghanistan

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June 2004



Abstract

Finding and maintaining good access to information is one of the most important coping skills for many Afghans in insecure and rapidly shifting situations. Returning refugee populations face deeply rooted structural problems on returning to their villages: millions of landmines continue to litter the countryside, ethnic tension is high, and lawlessness afflicts civilian populations. Due to poor communication infrastructure, villages are often isolated and disconnected from the resources and information that flow into Kabul and other major urban centres. Many villages continue to rely on informal information structures or the radio for the majority of their news.

Understanding women's radio access and listening, particularly in economically depressed, remote areas of Afghanistan is an important step in understanding the impact and effectiveness of the investments being made in the media sector. This report outlines radio reception issues for very vulnerable women in an effort to support radio organizations in Afghanistan in their service delivery. The following study was conducted in a remote mountainous region of Samangan province, and focuses on understanding women's media use in a poor Hazara village, using a quantitative survey of female heads of households, focus groups with women, girls, and men, semi-structured interviews, and observation as the main sources of its data.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful for the help and guidance of Orzala Ashraf, Engineer Noori, Ihsan, and Elias at Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA) in Kabul. Many thanks to Mark Eggerman, independent media researcher, for invaluable advice. Simona Lanzoni at Gruppo Volontariato Civile (GVC) for warm and generous housing support. Jane McElhone and Jaime Little at the Institute for Media, Policy, And Civil Society (IMPACS) for insight into women's radio, John West and Sunil Shetty at Internews for their collaboration on research efforts, and Habiba Sarabi at the Ministry of Women's Affairs for so generously sharing her thoughts and her time. And of course, my deep gratitude to the men, women, and youth of Now Boloq for their warm hospitality and quick generous friendship, with very special thanks to my four young translators and patient survey colleagues, Nadereh, Halimah, Shah Gol, and Malika.

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Summary

This study concludes that current operational assumptions of western radio organizations have created significant gaps between what rural Afghan women require and what their media system provides. While half of the households surveyed owned radios, women reported that broadcasts were too difficult for them to understand and hence only 12% listened to the radio. Linguistic barriers, the positioning of the radio set as part of the "man's world," and lack of relevance of radio programming were major factors in low listening patterns of women.

Radio and word of mouth were often the women's only connection with the outside world. Forced migration had introduced many of the women to other communities and media systems, but on returning to their village, their mobility and access to alternative media was again highly restricted. While some girls were attending elementary school classes, all the women in the village were illiterate.

With the heavy investments of international agencies, there is an opportunity to make significant improvements in the quality of life and health of rural women via radio. The women surveyed in this study identified women's rights, proper Islam, women's health, good childrearing, and family counseling as topics of relevance to their lives. However, radio organizations will have to rethink the packaging and timing of their broadcasts in order to engage and serve rural women more effectively.

Disconnected from Discourse

Women's Radio Listening in Rural Samangan, Afghanistan[1]

Sarah Kamal[2]

I. INTRODUCTION

This report has grown out of repeated requests by radio organizations for information on listening habits in Afghanistan. The fall of the Taliban regime has led to heavy investment in the media sector by international organizations interested in building democracy and an informed citizenry in the country. In the absence of census data and radio reception research, however, many radio organizations have been working with little reliable information to inform their programming decisions. The general assumptions have been that Afghanistan has a "radio culture," [3] that almost all households own radio sets,[4] and that radio is the most effective way of reaching illiterate populations.[5] This study raises questions on the advisability of operating with such assumptions uncritically.

Women in particular have been a poorly understood demographic. Access to females is restricted for cultural and religious reasons, and as a result, radio reception research has often depended on men as informants of domestic listening habits.[6] From a humanitarian and development perspective, however, women comprise a particularly important audience for radio programming. Women have been granted an unprecedented public voice in their nation's history, yet many lack the means and resources to understand and engage with political processes. The fall of the Taliban may have relaxed central government regulations on the wearing of the burqa for women in Afghanistan, but lack of security and the restrictions of purdah and tradition continue to restrict women's mobility in rural contexts. Radio is often the only connection such women have to the outside world. Meanwhile, outdated and harmful practices that run counter to women's rights, both from the standpoint of Islam and international conventions, flourish.

As a result, this study examines women's radio reception in a rural community in Samangan Province, Afghanistan, to explore issues of practical interest for media Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The starting point of this inquiry is a quantitative survey of 67 female heads of households (out of 69 households in the village), followed by semi-structured interviews and focus groups of women, men, and girls. The paper concludes with recommendations on improving programming for rural women.

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1 This research was supported by Oxfam International, MIT Wilson Awards and the Mellon-MIT Inter-University Program on Non-Governmental Organizations and Forced Migration

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33 http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/afghanistan/media.html

4 Interview with BBC Kabul Drama Department Coordinator, January 2003.

5 Interview with Spozhmai Maiwandi, VOA Pashto Coordinator, April 2003.

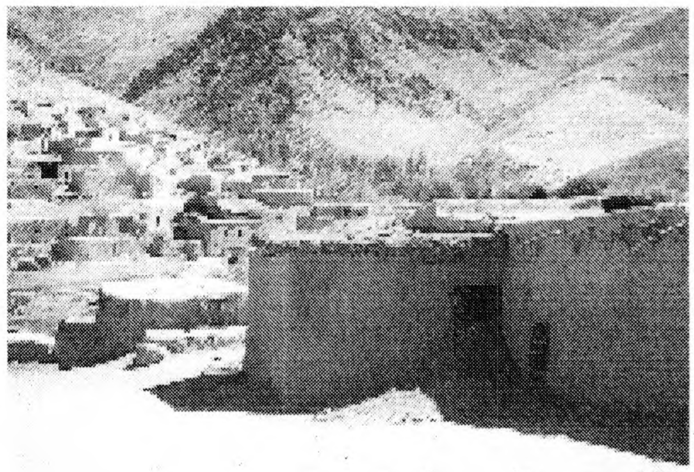
6 A 1997 Intermedia survey of male heads-of-households in Kabul is one of the few audience research reports available to media organizations in Afghanistan. Internews Afghanistan has also performed a 2003 "snapshot" rapid listening assessment of Kabul men, with limited results. On the other hand, a very thorough 2002 Media Support Solutions radio listening survey of Balkh Province has drawn data evenhandedly from both men and women.

The village studied in this project is Now Boloq, a Dari-speaking, ethnic Hazara, Shi'a[7] by religion settlement in a remote area of Samangan province. With a population of 400, the village is 3 hours from the main Puleh Khumri – Aybak road, by jeep or all-terrain vehicle only. Villagers depend on a nearby mountain spring for water, and have no electricity or health services in the village. Their main economic activities are animal husbandry and farming by men, and carpet weaving by women and children. Over 50% of the 70 families in the village are returned refugees, mostly from Pakistan.

[7] Community members identified themselves as "Jaafari" or the branch of Shi'ism predominant in Iran. Of the 36 settlements scattered through their local region, they said 60% were Jaafari, and 40% Ismaili.

II. QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

67 out of the 69 village households in Now Boloq were administered a questionnaire orally on radio use. The subjects interviewed were the female heads of each household (as identified by the households) ranging from 13 to 80 years of age. All were Shi'a by religion and ethnic Hazara. All the women were illiterate, with two having received some schooling on the Koran. The households on average had enough economic leverage to have food every day, but not quite enough for the luxury of owning chickens or a donkey.



A. Summary of findings

- **44% of the households surveyed owned working radio sets.** 6% owned sets that worked but were out of batteries, and another 6% owned broken sets. This was a different reality from the perception that was often expressed by the villagers (and some media NGOs) that "everyone owns a radio." Reasons for not owning a radio included "I don't have a man, so why would I have one?", the recent marriage of a brother who took the radio with him to his new home, sharing with a neighbour, poverty, and being illiterate. All the radios were battery operated. 2 households owned two radio sets, and one household owned a TV, which was run by the village's only generator.

- **12% of the women surveyed reported listening to the radio.** Of those, the programming they reported listening to was "the BBC and the radio from Kabul [Radio Afghanistan]," "news from Pakistan, Iran, and the US," "news and music," and "programming from Kabul and abroad." Reasons for listening included enjoyment and to find out "what they are saying about the world."

- **All the women surveyed said they had difficulty understanding radio broadcasts.** While 100% of the women were Dari-speaking and spoke no other language, Dari programming (news in particular) was beyond their comprehension. "I don't understand," "We are blind from illiteracy," and "They use difficult words which men understand" were recurring themes in the interviews. 2 women mentioned BBC's *New Home, New Life* as a program that they listened to and understood, but otherwise, women reported having to ask their husbands or children for clarification, or simply did not listen to broadcasts.

- **The radio sets were predominantly controlled by the man/men of the households.** In 88% of the households with working radio sets, only men turned the radio set on and off. In the remaining 12%, women were secondary controllers. Women cited not knowing how to use the radio and lack of interest/not listening as the main reasons for not using the set.

- **63% of the women felt that it was not at all important to know about events in Afghanistan.** Only 9% of women felt that it was very important, important, or somewhat important to stay abreast of news. 27% had no opinion. The main reasons for lack of

interest in news were frustration over not understanding, lack of time/opportunity, and the remoteness of the village. Women expressed this as follows: "I like work better than news;" "I would like to listen to the news, but I have many children;" and "we're in the mountain – what news should we listen to?"

- **The most common listening time was 8pm at night.** Women reported listening times as being during dinner. 2 women also reported that the radio was on for lunch around 1-2pm. One woman expressed listening time as being "whenever my husband is idle," and another said the radio was on at times of her husband's choice.

- **The radio was kept in the house in the main eating/sleeping room in all households**. In 13% of the households was occasionally moved closer to the carpet loom (either outside or in a subsidiary room) or taken outside with the men of the household.

- **If they were to influence radio programming, women wanted broadcasts of "good news."** Women generally expressed a preference for "happy news" and "news that they could understand." They wanted music, news about a peaceful world, and justice. They cited preferences for educational programming, which could help them out of their *Koohi* (which means mountainous, but also connotes primitive and uncivilized) state. Iranian radio was seen as a source of good Islamic programming. Women also enjoyed Iranian programs that offered advice on raising children and fostering a harmonious family life.

B. Notes on survey administration

The women were not good informants for radio reception patterns in the household. Their immediate answer to questions on the station, hour, and programming of domestic radio listening was usually "I don't know." At best, they labeled the stations as "the radio from Kabul" or "the radio from Pakistan," etc.

The women had very low numeracy skills. The majority of the women did not know their own ages, and guessed to the nearest decade, and were not in the habit of thinking about time.

The precise wording of the survey questions, which had piloted well, was often lost in explanations and simplifications required to draw answers from interviewees with extremely low language and conceptual skills. I surveyed the village with the help of village schoolgirls who acted as my guides and city-Dari-to-village-Dari interpreters. We focused more on the women understanding and answering questions correctly than on strict word choice.

As many of the villagers had previously benefited from humanitarian distributions, they often felt it in their interest to present themselves as destitute when asked their economic situation directly. Thus, a subjective scan of household furnishings and clothes and livestock (if any) was used to rate the level of wealth of the households surveyed.

The survey administration was far from ideal, as the highly social context of rural Samangan had crowds gathering every time a questionnaire was administered. Husbands and neighbouring women would interject and give answers occasionally, although they would quieten after polite requests that they stop. On the other hand, the presence of community members during survey administration may have ensured more accurate responses.

As this was the first survey of this sort in the village, in the words of one community leader "there was a party the night the survey began" as the women compared notes on what was said and word spread about the 'list-taker' in their midst. As such, on the second and third days of the survey, the women already had some idea of the survey questions, and occasionally seemed to give unusually quick answers. The survey questions and notes on their administration are attached as the Appendix.

III. QUALITATIVE DATA

The qualitative data collection period was cut short due to lowgrade tension between two members of opposing factions in the village whose conflict dated back to the early 1990s and a massacre of over 70 villagers. Further, the outbreak of armed clashes between opposing warlords in neighbouring Balkh Province had increased instability in the region. Thus, interviews and focus groups were conducted in 4 days rather than the 11 days anticipated.

These circumstances, however, were instructive in demonstrating the depth of division between Afghans, often within the same village and often between blood relatives. A major task of radio organizations will be in supporting reconciliation and peacebuilding.

The data below is drawn from participant observation, 5 semi-structured interviews, and 4 focus groups. The semi-structured interviews were with the school headmaster, his wife, and 3 women who visited me. Two of the focus groups were conducted with 10 schoolgirls aged 11-16, one with 5 of their mothers, and one with 4 male leaders of the village.

A. Women's daily lives and the radio set



Women's lives in the village are very hard and filled with continuous physical labour. The women wake early in the morning to knead and bake bread in kilns that they fire with bundles of painstakingly gathered dry brush or dung patties. They also make several liters of tea in the same kiln. After feeding the children and their husband, and attending to in-laws, they clean and sweep their homes. They attend to livestock, if they have any. After serving lunch, breastfeeding their younger children, and arranging for their naps, women sit at the carpet loom, often with their children.

In the early evening, the women go en masse to fetch water, either strapping several gallons of water to themselves, or (for the fortunate few) loading them onto a donkey. Dinner preparations and cleanup then take up the bulk of the night.

About once a week, the women wash clothes in the frigid spring feeding the village, and if there are no young boys in the household, range far afield to gather dry brush for cooking purposes.

While they roam freely within the village grounds, women report leaving the village only once or twice a year, usually to go to hospitals in nearby towns. Most were married by the age of 13 to males aged 18 years or sometimes much older, and began childrearing soon after that.

Women complained that there was little to look forward to in the tedium of their repetitive daily chores, with only occasional marriages, funerals, or sicknesses to break the monotony. "You just go through the days from this Friday to the next, wash your clothes, do your work. You have to work, or you don't eat."

They said that "life is hard, there is no proper life" and that "days pass" – expressing a lack of hope or interest in the future, as it was bound to be only more of the same. They recognized that living in the village made them different from urban women: "if we were in the city, we'd become young, but we wander in the mountain, and have become old."

The radio set was not an integral part of the women's lives. It was on primarily when husbands or elder sons were home. The women saw their own lack of education as the major block to using the radio set. They seemed to equate their illiteracy and "mountain woman" identity with stupidity: "The school headmaster tried everywhere to find female teachers for our school. He went this way and that, but all he could find, with difficulty, were male teachers. People of the mountain are this stupid."

Women were responsible for the storage and safety of the radio set as they were more generally for all domestic goods, but otherwise had a limited relationship with the radio.

B. Radio sets and girls

In a number of households, the women stored the radio in a plastic bag that was hung from a nail high up in the wall in a position of relative importance, outside the reach of younger children. The two focus groups of educated girls in the village confirmed the radio set's importance. The girls felt that people who had radio sets were "enlightened" or "knowledgable" relative to those who did not. They said that it was the means through which "all the people of the government spoke" and "all the good talk of the world is broadcast."

They also reported that children were usually not allowed to touch the radio dials, and that they were forbidden from making noise while the radio was tuned to news. The majority said that their mothers didn't touch the radio station, and waited for others, males mostly, who "knew how to turn on the station." All perceived the set as belonging to the male head of the household.



The girls said they understood the broadcasts in bits and pieces, but had particular trouble with newscasts. They confirmed that their mothers had trouble understanding the radio.

When asked why their mothers didn't use the radio more, one group felt that it was because their mothers had too much work, and the other felt it was because they were illiterate. Both groups reported, however, that there was no difference in listening between girls and boys in their homes, and also believed that radio was for both men and women.

There is a difference suggested here in the radio listening of mothers and daughters that could be the result of generational, class-based, or educational factors, among others. The schoolgirls interviewed were attending a free elementary school in the village sponsored by an Afghan NGO. The school had promoted the importance of education through awareness raising campaigns and even a visit by the Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to interview uneducated girls in the village to compare their radio attitudes with that of the schoolgirls. However, it seems reasonable to suggest that the education of the schoolgirls, their more developed "city Dari" skills, and their exposure to progressive gender messages via the school increased their radio listening potential relative to that of their mothers.

C. The gendered ownership of the radio set – a reading

There may be domestic functions behind the clearly male ownership and control of the radio set. Positioning the radio set within the male domain increases its aura of authority and importance. Both focus groups of girls reported that they were not allowed to make noise while the radio was turned on, especially when it was tuned to the news. For men entering the bustling household, the radio set facilitated an established, routine way to create order and enforce silence on unruly children.

The radio set created silence, but also filled silence. There was often a substantial gap between husbands and wives in terms of literacy skills, age, and range of experience. A significant number of men in the community could read and do sums, but had illiterate, innumerate wives. Where men often left town to work or conduct trade in outside towns or cities, women for the most part only knew the village environment. Husbands and wives often could not hold equal conversations. Thus, the radio set could fill silence when husband and wife had little left to talk about, and preoccupy the husband as his wife went about her domestic chores. One woman said ruefully of her husband that "if you're talking, sometimes he listens; sometimes if the radio's on, he doesn't listen."

Women perceived the radio set to be a tool of the educated and mobile, and outside the scope of their own lives. Thus, to some extent, women themselves may have contributed to the positioning of the radio set as part of the male domain. Regardless, the radio's circle of chatter in most households excluded women, and appeared to be a physical mechanism for creating privileged male space within the bustling female domain of the household.

D. The effect of migration

According to older male informants, Now Boloq village was founded 70-80 years ago by ethnic Pushtuns. The Pushtuns deserted the newly established village for unknown reasons, and the abandoned houses were taken over by a mix of Tajik and Hazara people. The Tajik gradually left, until the village became entirely Hazara.

During the time of Mujahideen factional fighting in Afghanistan (the early 1990s), 70 villagers were massacred in an extreme episode of fighting between opposing factions in the village. This caused a severe rift in the fabric of the community that continues more or less unresolved today.

With the rise of the Taliban, the Mujahideen males fled the village. Three years of locusts, drought, and hunger forced more residents to leave. Of the 100 families in the village, only 20

families remained in the village throughout the time of the Taliban and their fall. The other 80 migrated to neighbouring towns, to Pakistan or to Iran.

Now that the situation in the village has improved, most of the migrant families have returned, except for about 20 families. Refugees that went to Iran tended to stay in Iran, whereas the linguistic and religious barriers in Pakistan caused refugees in Pakistan to return within a year or two of migrating.

For this particular settlement, in which most returnees had been in Pakistan, there did not appear to be significant difference in women returnee listening habits compared with the women who did not migrate. Women reported very little interest in listening to the radio before, during, and after migration. Nor was there conclusive evidence to determine whether the migration of family members to a neighbouring country skewed women's listening habits to that country's media broadcasts.

Young girls reported that they did not generally listen to radio broadcasts in exile, as they were "too busy" with other, usually income generating, activities. However, one young woman reported that during the US bombing of Afghanistan, the radio was constantly on, and tuned to news.

Male informants explained that because of the economic hardship of refugee life in Pakistan, returnees often had little spare time to spend or money to spend on luxuries like the radio. Returnees were physically more weak than when they left and often had just enough money to return. Mentally, there were generally not many changes in the older generation, but the youth learned clothing styles and hygiene. In terms of radio listening preferences, there was perhaps a greater liking for Hindi music than before.

One young returnee girl said that she had never heard of programming for refugees, but when she'd been a refugee, she'd have been "very happy to hear that our country is calm. It was really difficult being a refugee in a foreign country, not understanding the language."

E. Programming of relevance for rural women



When asked what their mothers would like to listen to, schoolgirls mentioned radio programming that had lots of music, was funny, understandable, and had stories, like BBC soap opera *New Home, New Life*. They recommended "a good program that they could listen to and be happy" rather than discussions on "things about farflung countries that they don't get."

It would be useful, they felt, for their mothers to learn "how to raise children," and be informed on "the importance of children going to school." Programs that guided were seen positively.

The focus group of women identified access to health information as a major issue:

"To the extent of men, our women also work their hearts out. Then on top of this work they also get pregnant, and give birth. After all this trouble of childbirth, the child is sick, there's no medicine, the child dies, and all this has been for nothing. We are the people of the mountain, and this is the way."

Because of the costliness of transporting and treating women, and their low income earning potential, women's health is often given low priority: "by the time they take you to [a clinic] they may as well have taken you to a cemetery."

Domestic violence was pinpointed as a widespread problem: "it's like we're animals...men beat you beat you beat you enough to break your bones. If only women understood their rights! If only someone would come and educate women and men that women also have rights. That she works hard in the house and has rights."

The women saw the agitation for women's rights in the cities as having decreased the level of domestic abuse: "my husband doesn't dare hit me as much now."

Women wanted radio programming to help them "learn something about raising children." They also wanted the radio to emphasize "not to marry girls early." A recurring theme was the need to understand their rights and "wife and husband roles" as practiced outside of the village:

"Some men say: sit, woman, what do you know? They talk like that, but this is from the stupidity of people, isn't it. From their lack of knowledge and illiteracy...everybody is a human person, right?"

Very few women had the opportunity to study the Koran the way men did, and thus were interested in programming that would allow women to "understand [their] own Muslimness."

The women's emotions began roiling over at the end. One woman "shouted her pain" at having only daughters – her husband was getting a second wife because of her failure at delivering a son. Not having children was a source of great shame in the community, as was failure to bear a son. Both were considered the woman's deficiency.

Poor nutrition was also seen as a problem. The nutrient value of the community's food was poor – high in starch and oil, and essentially devoid of vegetables. Lack of meat was seen as the diet deficiency by the women – vegetables were not valued. Further, women generally ate after men and guests had eaten. "If there were good food, I would have had 12 boys," said the sonless mother.

One mother of 12 later told me in a quiet aside that pregnancy prevention was important. "I have had children one after another. I have eye problems because of this. I have asked my husband for medicine to stop having babies, but my husband tells me to keep having more [children]."

Male informants felt that women needed programming about tuberculosis, stories, recreation, and laughter. They could benefit from programs on hygiene, and raising children. The men said that political news, and news of the world was not immediately relevant to women in their community.

They felt that their community could benefit from learning the importance of school and education, and adult literacy programs. One informant reported that in village life, the winter is a

time of relaxation for men, and it would be a good time to broadcast literacy programs at that time to allow men to improve themselves.

Awareness raising to increase the community's level of culture was important: "after 23 years of war, [people] are more likely to destroy than build. They should know to use all their resources to construct, and send their kids to school....For our people, arms are important. Books and tables and the school building are not important. People are only looking out for themselves. People should learn to stand on their own two feet – look for longterm results rather than the food distribution. The NGOs are here short term. We have to think of building our own future."

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is limited in scope to a Hazara, Dari-speaking, mountainous rural community of 400 in Samangan Province. In many ways, it raises more questions than it answers. However, its findings do strongly suggest that current radio programming is not as effective as it could be in reaching rural women.

An interview[8] with the Minister of Women's Affairs, Habiba Sorabi, herself a Hazara woman, offered her sense of the divide between the activities of the international media organizations and the needs of Afghan women. "Democracy is fashionable right now, as is media reconstruction," she said. "But the question is, what impact is it having? The West wants freedom of expression and works to develop that area, but...should actually be working at the level of people in Afghanistan...The BBC has high experience in this regard, and has broadcast several dialogues between young girls, 8-11 years old, on health issues, using very ordinary language." The BBC's program, she maintains, has been successful where many others have not.

The efforts of media organizations have been positive from many standpoints. However, they have also shown an unfortunate lack of accountability to their audience in some respects. It is very important that media organizations invest more time into feedback mechanisms and audience reception studies. Based on this investigation, it seems reasonable to suggest that significant numbers of rural women are cut off from the discourses and engagements of their society. Some recommendations to improve radio's accessibility for rural women follow:

- Everyday, spoken Dari is very different from the formal, very literary Dari used in most media and literature. Afghan radio hosts by default use formal Dari in their broadcasts – in rural contexts, this alienates a substantial segment of the population, and quite likely alienates a significant segment of urban populations as well. An immediate and easy way to encourage rural women's radio listening is to use proper grammar, but simple, everyday words. The BBC's *New Home, New Life* is a good model in this regard.

- The focus of journalistic stories in Afghanistan are often on the painful stories of torn lives and lost loved ones, rather than on joy. There is perhaps a tension between the desire of Afghan journalists to produce investigative journalism that probe painful subjects, and the need of many Afghan women to be reassured that their world is now a safe place. Painful subjects should not be avoided, but positive achievements and hope

[8] Interview with Habiba Sarabi, Minister of Women's Affairs, October 2003.

should also be given appropriate airtime. Perhaps the recurring mantra of "23 years of war" can be replaced with "2 years of peace and rebuilding."

- Only 44% of households in this study had working radio sets, and many of those were old Soviet issue. For women to have access to radio programming and feel greater ownership of the radio set, it would be advisable to have radio distributions for women in rural communities. This may encourage women to control the radio set more than they do at present, as it will be theirs in name.

- Factual information on women's health and women's rights are important building blocks for women's empowerment. Simple, easy to digest, and inclusive messages (that demonstrate improved women's rights are linked to improved community well-being, for example) could be aired around 8-9pm.

- There should be better coordination between the media NGOs and the government, particularly the Women's Ministry and the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development – not for radio stations to be ministry mouthpieces, but to enable communication flow. The ability of poorly funded government agencies to reach rural Afghans is currently very low, and their inability to communicate with their constituents only worsens the difficulties of the central government.

- There may be opportunities for creating a strong future listening base among women by targeting programming at young rural girls. This may also be an effective way of reaching their mothers.

- It seems reasonable to suggest that many rural communities like Now Boloq have suffered armed conflict between two opposing factions that are now living in uneasy, inter-married ceasefire with each other. Wounds are deep, and reconciliation and peace messages are a priority to support the shift from short-term war/poverty/survival mentalities to longer-term disarmament and reconstruction.

V. APPENDIX: RADIO SURVEY QUSTIONS AND NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

Administered to female head of household, as identified by the household

[Ritual greeting: older woman holds and kisses the forehead of younger woman, then younger woman turns her head to kiss the older woman's right palm. Or in women of equal age, kiss each other's hands]

Hello, good morning. My name is Sarah, and I'm trying to understand how women listen to the radio. I want to speak with you a bit, and if you give me permission,[9] ask you some questions about the radio, and record your answers. You don't have to give me answers, and if you don't know the answer it doesn't matter. I will not give your name to anyone. Will you speak with me today?
[*If permission granted:*] Very well. So let us begin:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age? (**Prompt**: how old is your oldest child?)[10]
3. What language do you speak at home?
4. Do you speak any other languages? (**Prompt**: do you know Pashto? Uzbeki?)[11]
5. What is your ethnicity?[12]
6. What is your religion and sect?
7. Have you studied?
8. Do any of your family members live outside Afghanistan? (**Prompt**: do you have brothers or sisters etc. in Pakistan or Iran?) Where are they?
9. Have you ever migrated? Where? How long? How long has it been that you are back?
10. Do you work? What do you do? (**Prompt**: do you weave carpets?)
11. *[Subjective scan of furnishings, clothes, and livestock to grade relative economic situation as one of:*
    a. ***very poor:*** *occasionally go hungry*
    b. ***poor:*** *have food, but live very basic lives*
    c. ***average:*** *own a few chickens or a donkey*
    d. ***well-off:*** *own a cow, use luxury soap*
    e. ***extremely well-off:*** *own extremely scarce items in the village (a horse, a television, a herd of sheep)*]
12. How important is it for you to know what is going on in Afghanistan?[13]
13. Where do you get your news from?
14. Do you own a radio? [*If yes, ask:*] How many? Can I see it/them?
15. [*Examine the radio(s), if any. Note the following:*
    a. *if they are broken or in working condition*
    b. *if they operate on batteries or another source of energy*

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[9] One source of bewilderment for me was how to get across the concept of "permission." I used the simplest word I know in Dari – *ejazeh* – but a number of women in the village did not know the word. My city Dari to village Dari translator/guide, a young girl from the village, was similarly perplexed. The best we came up with, after *migzarid?* (will you allow?) brought a blank look, was a plain "can we ask you some questions?" which doesn't give me the same feeling. This problem wasn't as important here as it was during focus groups, when I tried to ask whether the women or children had permission to switch on the radio set.
[10] Women generally did not know their age, and would give an answer like: "well, I am probably past 30 years of age…." For those who were very unsure, we would guess based off their eldest child's age, plus 15 years.
[11] This and the following prompts were often required to help the women understand the questions we were asking.
[12] Where I was used to putting demographic questions at the end of surveys, I soon realized that the women preferred such questions to be at the beginning, as these were questions they could answer easily. Ethnicity and religion were not sensitive issues, as everyone in the village was the same.
[13] At first many of these were scale questions, i.e., 1 - very important; 2 – quite important; 3 – important; 4 – not very important; 5 – not important at all. The women didn't seem to understand that they were to express intensity of their response, and usually stuck to binary responses despite prompts. I wasn't very comfortable with the results of these questions or the way I'd administered scale questions.

c. *if battery operated, are the batteries good or do they have to be replaced*
d. *ask the woman to turn the radio on, and tune it*
e. *if they are only radios, or radios with a tape deck*
f. *The quality of the reception*
g. *The frequencies that work*]

16. Do you listen to the radio? [*If yes, ask:*]
    a. What times do you listen?
    b. What programs do you listen to?
    c. Do you know the stations that they are broadcast from?[14]
17. How many people live in your house? Who are they?
18. Who listens to the radio?
19. Do you/they listen together or separately?
20. Who switches the radio on and off? Anyone else?
21. Who chooses the channel? Anyone else?
22. Where do you listen? (**Prompt**: in the house, at the carpet loom, outside...?)
23. What kinds of programs would you yourself like to hear on the radio? (**Prompt**: if the language were simple enough on the radio for you to understand, what kind of things would you want to hear?)

[Thank the interviewee for her time, present her with a small package of candy with warm wishes for her family and comment that in my culture, it is rude to enter someone's home without leaving a tiny token to sweeten the family's mouth.]

[14] Initially, the questionnaire had a list of local and foreign broadcasters and times so that specific hours and stations could be prompted for and recorded carefully on the coding sheet. The original idea was to get a snapshot of what they may have listened to yesterday, and also to gain a sense of what they identify as their regular stations in a week. The women were very poor informants of radio listening, however. I gave up after a few tries, thinking that I could return and ask the men, but had to leave before managing to do so.